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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

OCTOBER 1st, 1851.

BERLIOZ ON THE "UNISON" PSALM OF THE GREAT EXHIBITION.

"All people that on earth do dwell."

Contributed by E. HOLMES, Author of the "Life of Mozart."

WE have to thank a distinguished French juror of 'the Great Exhibition' for directing attention to curiosities in the music of London, greater than any contained within the crystal walls of the Palace in Hyde Park. Berlioz, the friend of Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer,—himself a great composer,—has written a fresh and delightful account of the anniversary meeting of the charity children at St. Paul's, which has been published in the *Courrier de L'Europe*.

This annual congregation of 6500 children, clean and neatly dressed, seated on an erection under the dome of the cathedral, has always been celebrated, and justly so, as one of our metropolitan spectacles of the month of May, most interesting to the eye of humanity and benevolence. But as a sight it has generally passed off, and it is left for accomplished foreigners, who have heard the greatest wonders of the art, to bear testimony to the music. It is, therefore, pleasant to hear with their ears, and to participate in their sensations.

Towards the close of the last century, Haydn astonished the musical world by saying—"This performance of the charity children is the finest thing I ever heard." It was the thrilling unison,—the extraordinary effect resulting from the vast body of voices in peculiar proportion and correspondence to the locality,—which caused this declaration; for nothing generally can be more artless and inexpressive than the psalm-singing of children, and under ordinary circumstances, it is fortunate when it has any claim to be considered as music. Yet these humble performers, in their aggregate capacity, gain testimonials which might be envied by more accomplished musical societies. Collectively, fine voices and good ears predominate—the pitch is maintained at their anniversary meeting by trumpets—the organ supports but cannot drown the vast unison—and the effect of the whole is such, that no opera or other scientific effort has struck the ear of the stranger with the power of this simple and unpretending performance. If habit or prejudice have blunted the faculties of any who have heretofore been auditors—perhaps in no very favorable position—it might be worth while to hear again. All the greatest authorities concur in opinion; and Berlioz, who has heard all the orchestras of Europe, has had more experience in the powers

of sound than any living musician, will be listened to by all who know his compositions, with peculiar deference and respect.

Bent on judging for himself respecting this unique performance, his eye no sooner caught the advertisement, than he set to work to procure a ticket, and he not only obtained this through the politeness of Mr. Goss, the organist of St. Paul's, but also received those peculiar attentions and facilities for hearing which were due to him as a man of European reputation. He was much pleased to pass disguised amidst the procession of the choristers in that day, wearing a surplice, and carrying in his hand a bass part. Whether Duprez, the great tenor singer, also assisted in the choral service, and walked incognito in a surplice, we are not informed, but he was certainly present, and a most delighted and interested listener. It should be remembered, that Duprez, who received his first impressions of the art in M. Choron's school of sacred music, was well fitted by education and feeling to appreciate the service he heard. There can be no suspicion of exaggeration on either part; and Berlioz, while confessing that what he saw and heard was the most extraordinary thing in his life, assures the editor, to whom he writes, that he may rely on his not lightly using any term of admiration.

Before the music commenced, our author experienced a certain vague emotion from the preparations which he saw going on around him. He gives an admirable sketch of the general arrangements for seeing and hearing throughout the whole of the vast interior. As the groups of children enter, taking their places under the banner of their respective parishes, or the part of London to which they belong, he is struck with a spectacle akin to the phenomenon of crystallization in the microscopic world. At length the whole of the spacious amphitheatre is filled to the topmost row of seats, extending, in their numerous gradations, almost as high as the capitals of the columns. The scaffolding partly covered by little girls in their white caps and tippets, and with their red and green ribbons, recalls to his travelled vision a mountain covered with snow, but intersected here and there with patches of flowers and herbs. The audience form a back-ground—a *chiar-oscuro* to the incomparable spectacle. Throughout the whole, such order prevails, as excites the liveliest surprise. The children take their seats with a grave gladness, exempt from turbulence. Berlioz overheard his English neighbours whispering one another, "*What a scene! What a scene!*" and he adds, truly enough, that no theatre, however great or rich, ever approached this reality, which, even after he had witnessed it, appeared to him like a dream. At length the music begins:—

"After a chord on the organ, the first psalm

sung by this unprecedented choir arose in gigantic unison,

All people that on earth do dwell
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

To attempt to give you an idea of the effect would be utterly useless. Compared in power and beauty to the most massive musical combinations that you ever heard, it is as St. Paul's at London to the church of *Ville-d'Avray*, and a hundred times greater. I should add that this 100th Psalm, which is in slow notes and of a grand character, was supported by the organ in superb harmonies. I was greatly surprised and pleased to learn that the melody, long attributed to Luther, is by Claude Goudimel,* *Maître de Chapelle* at Lyons, in the sixteenth century. It was first printed at Geneva in 1543.

"Notwithstanding the agitation and the oppression which I experienced, I was enabled to master myself sufficiently to take my part in the psalms which were next chanted by the choir. By the end of Boyce's *Te Deum* I was quite calm. But at the Coronation Anthem, in which the children joined the smaller choir from time to time, merely to ejaculate such solemn exclamations as *God save the King! Long live the King! Amen! Hallelujah!* the electrifying process recommenced. My neighbour thinking that I had lost the place or not counted the rests properly, was every moment shewing me on his part where we were. Again at the psalm in triple time by Ganthony, an old English musician (1774), sung by all the voices, with trumpets, drums, and organ: at the hearing of this melody glowing with inspiration, its noble and touching expression and grand harmony,—nature reasserted her right to be weak—and I was obliged to use my music to hide my face."

This 'sublime piece' concluded, and while the Archbishop of Canterbury was delivering the sermon—which distance prevented Berlioz from hearing—one of the official people came to conduct him to different parts of the church, that he might enjoy the scene under various aspects and points of view. He was now left at the 'bottom of the crater of the vocal volcano,' which when it recommenced its eruption in the last psalm, its power was "*double what it had been in any other place.*"

Other famous musicians partook in his emotion.

"Going out I met old Cramer, who in his transport forgetting that he speaks French perfectly cried out to me in Italian: *Cosa stupenda! stupenda! la gloria dell' Inghilterra.* And then Duprez—that great artist who in the course of his brilliant career has moved so many people—was moved in turn, and it was certainly these

English children who payed off the old debts of France. I never saw Duprez in such a condition—he wept, he sobbed, he was unable to control his feelings."

In the midst of all the excitement which this simple but sublime unison creates in our accomplished visitors, Berlioz cannot but remark the air of insensibility with which the Turkish ambassador passes by, accompanied by a handsome young Indian, as if both had been listening to nothing more than the screaming in a mosque. Our author rightly thinks that these Orientals must want a sense.

That such an effect should be created by children who do not understand music, and who have never seen a note in their lives, who consequently come to church without parts or books, or anything to aid them in the execution, save the recollections of the practice of their psalms and anthems during some three months previous to the meeting, will much astonish the continental reader. However, a great deal of the wonder is diminished to those who know with how many of the children this service is traditional, and that their entrances in all uncertain places are regulated by a conductor supported by a numerous staff of trumpets and drums.

Berlioz is of opinion that the prodigious result of their unison is to be ascribed not merely to the enormous number of the singers and the fine quality of the voices—but to the position of the singers in the form of a very elevated amph-theatre. "The reflectors and producers of the sound being in good relative proportions, and the whole atmosphere of the church attacked on many points at once—vibrating in surface as well as in depth—the music acquires a power over the hearer, which, under ordinary conditions, the most learned efforts of the art have as yet failed to communicate any idea of." It is probable that the excess of vibration which is always felt at other times under the cupola of St. Paul's when music is going forward, is never so well corrected as it is at this anniversary, through the numerous attendance of singers and visitors.

The condition of the English children next occupies the attention of Berlioz. He hardly wonders that they have better voices than the children of the working population at Paris, seeing them so well fed, robust, and sturdy; it is natural that all their faculties should be favorably influenced by their physical superiority. The contrast which he draws between these children and those of Paris, is painful. In the suffering and debilitated countenances of the latter you read the consequences of bad and insufficient food, privation, and exhaustion.

Reckoning up what Paris could furnish in the way of an exhibition of "monumental music"

* This composer lost his life in the massacre of the Huguenots. He was decapitated, and his head thrown into the Rhone.

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like this, he is first embarrassed to find a locality. Notre-Dame would not do—but there is the Pantheon, if not of the same dimensions as St. Paul's, somewhat like it in the formation of the interior. The number of performers and of the audience would be less colossal—but the building being smaller, the effect might yet be extraordinary. He computes the musical force of Paris, as follows:—1500 children musicians—"like little Beaumont who sings in the choruses at the Opera"—500 women musicians, endowed with real voices; and more than 2000 men formed both by nature and education to bear a part. To these 4000 voices, he proposes to join an orchestra of 300 or 400 instrumentalists, and to unite their powers in some fine work adapted to bring them out—the subject to be a stirring and noble theme—"in which all the high thoughts which make the heart of man to beat, might vibrate and find expression." Such a manifestation of the most powerful of the arts, with the *prestige* of poetry and architecture, would, with the internal resources of the country alone, soon be possible in Paris. It has but to be willed, and it would be done; meantime the English, with the aid only of the first rudiments of music, have willed, and have accomplished it. "Great nation!" exclaims the enthusiastic writer, "whose instinct is that of great things. The spirit of Shakespeare is in it."

The chivalrous and generous national compliment must, in this instance, be received with qualification, since the musical merit and effect of the anniversary are somewhat accidental. That the performance has been improved by successive changes, by tradition and experience, is unquestionable; but the glorious choral purposes of the unison, such as they exist in the mind of a Haydn, or of a Berlioz, entered little into the ideas of the first founders of the ceremonial. It was in its origin a gathering wisely intended to enlist the sympathies of the rich in behalf of the parochial schools of growing and abounding London. But of the music, in the course of nearly a century little has been written by natives, and it is likely to grow in attraction and esteem now, principally through the remarkable interest in it displayed by eminent foreign composers, whose testimonies are both conscientious and valuable. At the same time, we must allow due latitude to the first impressions of catholic musicians at the simple sublimity of the unison of the Protestant service. Perhaps some of them had seen St. Paul's for the first time—in its mere space and proportions, an imposing sight—but filled with youthful humanity, and youthful voices, irresistibly appealing to the affections.

There is a play of the imagination in the musical writings of Berlioz, which renders them very attractive; they are full of those touches of natural

and profound feeling, which come home to the musician of experience. The composer quits the church after the service in a delirium of pleasure, hardly knowing where he is going to till he finds himself on board a Chelsea steamboat, getting drenched in a shower of rain, and with "All people that on earth do dwell," singing itself over and over again in his head. At night he cannot close his eyes, and he rises early to wend his way to the Palace, to contemplate London asleep, and to think with Wordsworth—

"That mighty heart is lying still."

No appearance, as yet, of mop or pail at any of the doors; an old Irishwoman is squatting on her heels and smoking a pipe in a corner of Manchester-square—the cows stretched on the grass in Hyde-park are quietly ruminating; the little *three-master* slumbers in the Serpentine; and some heavy lucid drops are beginning to fall from the glass roof of the Palace open to "All people that on earth do dwell."

The man who guards the portals of the Exhibition, accustomed to see Berlioz pass at all hours, admits him at once. The vast solitude, the silence of the interior of the Palace at seven o'clock in the morning, strikes him as a spectacle of singular grandeur:—

"All these silent fountains, these dumb organs, these motionless trees, this harmonious range of products transported from all corners of the earth by a hundred rival nations—ingenious labours born of peace, and instruments of destruction, which remind of war, seem then to be conversing among themselves in an unknown and mysterious language which must be heard by the *ear of the spirit*."

Thinking himself the sole living being within the walls, he is trying to interpret the conversation, but he finds he has two companions, a Chinese and a sparrow. With his most gracious air he approaches the Chinaman, who is cleaning some porcelain vases, and tenderly watering a poor Chinese flower. His "Good morning, sir," however, receives no reply. John Chinaman turns his back, and taking some sandwiches out of a box, begins to munch them with a seeming great contempt for such barbarian meats. Berlioz fancies that he sighs for the swallow-nest soup and other delicacies of the Celestial Empire.

He was more fortunate in cultivating the acquaintance of a sparrow which was hopping in and out of the mouth of the great brass cannon cast at Seville; he feeds this bird with some crumbs of biscuit that remained from his lunch at St. Paul's. Hosts of sparrows, we are told, were caught in that singular trap of Mr. Paxton's, but most of them had been poisoned. This was "the Joash of his race—the sole survivor of the

fury of Athalia"—Berlioz knows his retreat and will try to preserve him.

Ruminating thus, the great Irish bell in the Eastern gallery strikes eight, the fountains begin to play, the policemen take their places, M. Ducroquet's apprentice approaches the organ of his master meditating the new polka with which he intends to favor us—the manufacturers from Lyons are coming, and the diamonds, prudently hidden during the night, begin to reappear. Berlioz is beginning to feel sleepy, and is just nodding on the stool of Erard's Grand Piano, when his arm is touched, and he sees Thalberg. "Ah Confrère—the jury is assembling, and we must be diligent—there are 32 musical snuff-boxes, 24 accordions, and 13 bombardons, for us to examine to-day!"

A FIRST IMPRESSION OF THE GENIUS OF HECTOR BERLIOZ.

Contributed by E. HOLMES.

SINCE the first production of *Fidelio* in England, we have listened to nothing with such excitement and enthusiasm as to some of the compositions of M. Berlioz, performed in his very interesting concert on Monday, at Drury-lane. The discovery of a new pen in the art, exercised in the highest and most serious departments of music, with all the grave intention of a Beethoven or a Gluck, and in his lofty and independent walk realising effects which delight the imagination and warm the sympathies of the hearer, is no slight event. We the more cordially acknowledge the powerful impression made upon us by this first hearing of the compositions of M. Berlioz, because we went among the most mistrusting and infidel of the audience. Detraction and false criticism in professional whispers and newspaper paragraphs had predisposed us to expect a critical penance on the occasion; and this, coupled with a somewhat pardonable unwillingness hastily to believe in original genius, or that the implements of the great German masters had passed in reversion to a Frenchman, rendered us anticipative of anything but pleasure. Surprise and gratification were complete, as all these prejudices were dispersed before the beautiful, the original and poetical effects of the music; and we can only say, that if Berlioz is not Beethoven, he who can maintain such an activity of attention during four hours, by the frequency of original and interesting conceptions, must be a worthy follower of that master, and a poet musician of no common stamp. We left the house with an earnest desire to hear the whole of the music again, and as soon as possible. Compositions that are not only new in their plan and in their ideas, but which exercise an immense orchestra and chorus in perpetually new combinations, involve a responsibility in the hearing, which it is not very easy to fulfil on a single occasion. We are glad to have been thus dazzled by novelty in a variety of directions, and often to have laboured under a sense of imperfect admiration. It gives good promise of future pleasure.

The concert of M. Berlioz was performed on the stage by 250 vocal and instrumental performers, and the execution of the elaborate and difficult music was alike creditable on the part of the orchestra, the solo singers, and the chorus. The first part comprised an overture to the *Car-nival of Rome*, a romance called the "Young Shepherd," sung by Miss Miran, and a symphony called *Harold*, in four parts, with an obligato part for the tenor, played by Hill. The second part contained the first and second acts of *Faust*; and for the third we had a cavatina from

Bevenuto Cellini, sung by Madame Dorus Gras, a chorus of "Souls in Purgatory," from the Requiem of M. Berlioz, and the finale of a triumphal symphony.

Throughout the whole of these compositions the most honourable ambition of the artist is evident; there is no descent to vulgarity or appeal to the common ear. Even in the songs, an elevation of style and an originality of design, which the musician will best appreciate, are perceptible. It has been said that Berlioz has no melody. How then does he contrive to fix the attention of his hearers for hours? The fact is that he has melody—though not of the conventional standard—and he knows how to set it off, too, by exquisite harmonising and effects of instrumentation. We confess that, to our taste, some of the most beautiful things of the evening were the choruses from *Faust*, in the second part. The Easter Hymn is a noble composition. Recollection of the situation of this hymn in the original tragedy made us expect mere simplicity; but the piece is extraordinarily developed. When the voices of the men succeed those of the women in pealing choral grandeur, an immense effect is produced from the original treatment of the harmonies and intervals of the voices. Here, too, is a long and masterly pedal point well worth hearing. There was also in this part another beautiful and melodious chorus, succeeded by a sylph dance, so exceedingly fanciful and pretty, that the audience could not fail of encoring it. The chorus of Souls in Purgatory, in which the voices in octaves keep up a little plaintive monotonous phrase on the dominant of D minor, while the instruments continue, in the fugued style, a stream of severe counterpoint, is highly interesting and effective. The word original is too feeble and conventional to describe the effect of these works, which are pure creations. Then in the second part we had also a song of *Mephistophiles* admirably accompanied by brass instruments, a beautiful symphony illustrative of the aerial flight of Faust and his companion, and an Hungarian march, changing minor and major alternately, so triumphant and animating, that it would do honour to Beethoven. This march was even lately on the point of revolutionising Hungary. It was received with stormy enthusiasm, and played twice without hesitation. Many other things would have been re-demanded had time and consideration of the fatigues of the composer and performers permitted. The music demands incessant attention from the orchestra, and an unwonted accuracy and finish in the execution of difficult traits.

The mere physical result of this extraordinary performance puts the stamp of a great master on Berlioz. No man, by the resources of noise, of contrast, or of studied effect, is able to elevate the spirit of another man. The greater the means employed, so much the more fatal and imminent is failure. The heart is not dilated or the breath suspended on light occasions, and when such a state of sensibility is excited, we may be sure that feeling and imagination have been at work before. The musical world, who are prepared to go all lengths with the poetry of the art, and in opposition to those school dogmas which hold music in everlasting trammels, should hear Berlioz. They will see that the peculiar novelty of his mind and fancy are unfitted to the shackles of systems, and thank him for his courage in resisting them. This was an effort due to his own self-estimate, and he has carried it out during twenty years with indomitable resolution and perseverance. He has shaken the thrones of professors in conservatories, and won in a battle in which every unworthy art and ungenerous imputation have been used to put him down. There is no fear of the purity of the art being endangered through the example of Berlioz. Avarice cannot be tempted by it, for men do not get rich by composing great symphonies and choruses; and as for the pretension of mere idle vanity, that is soon flogged off the stage. The muse of high composition is still wooed in the beggar's garb. Three things effectually allay our